THE SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON AND DISTRICT
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TRENDS IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH

Hamilton-Wentworth Megatrends

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HAMILTON-WENTWORTH MEGATRENDS

The attached descriptions of the top ten "megatrends" for Hamilton-Wentworth have been prepared in preparation for a joint community consultation with the Hamilton Public Library on key community trends.

These trends represent the results of a consultation which was carried out by the SPRC for the Hamilton Public Library (HPL) in 1990, as one component of the HPL Strategic Planning process. For this report, the trends were elaborated and expanded, based on a variety of sources related to national, Provincial and local futures. It is hoped that these descriptions will be useful to a variety of organizations in our Region as they attempt to plan for an increasingly uncertain future.

1) The Changing Age Structure of the Population.

Our local population is undergoing significant changes in the distribution of age groups, which reflects important Provincial and National trends - fewer children and young adults; a significant growth in the middle-aged and elderly. Not only does this shift have important consequences for local services and local markets, it will also have important implications for our labour force. In 1988, 41% of our working-age population were "older workers" aged 45 and over. By 2006, this figure will rise to 53%. Correspondingly, younger workers, aged 15 to 24, will drop from 22% to 19%.

2) The Changing Employment Base

Our community is particularly affected by national trends which point to a continuing decrease in the manufacturing sector as a source of employment, due to our historical role as a manufacturing centre in the national economy. Downsizing and closures are affecting both the white-collar and blue-collar components of the manufacturing sector and these job losses are highly concentrated in the middle to high income ranges. This trend also reflects an ongoing attempt for large companies to "flatten" their organizational structures and reduce the level of management/supervisory personnel.

Employment creation is increasingly concentrated in the small business sector and there is a growing concern about a shortage of skilled workers in all sectors. Part of this concern arises from the slow-down in the rate of our labour force growth which, in turn, is a direct result of the changing age structure of the population. This will result in an increased emphasis upon increasing employment opportunities for groups who have been traditionally under-employed in our economy (i.e. women, disabled persons, aboriginal people).

3) Recession and Recovery

There is a growing recognition that the nature of recessions is changing. Recessions no longer represent just predictable downturns in the business-cycle but are complicated by significant factors related to the "permanent" restructuring of the economy. Predicting the nature of the post-recovery economy and the extent of the recovery, is becoming more and more difficult because of this changing nature of recessions. It is recognized, however, that the post-recovery economy may look very different from the pre-recession economy.

4) The Growth in Two-Income Families

For a variety of reasons which range from economic necessity to issues of gender equality, the two-income family is becoming the most common family unit in our community. This represents a fundamental change in the family unit which has implications for all sectors of our community. In a span of only twenty years, Canada moved from having one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the Western world, to having one of the highest. This shift has happened very quickly and it shows little sign of slowing down.

5) Changing Family Structures and Roles

In addition to the two-income trend, the structure of the family has changed dramatically as the historically dominant family type of "working dad, three kids, mom as housewife" has slipped to a minority position. It has been replaced by an array of family types - lone parents, childless couples, reconstituted families, elderly couples, and so on. Given the fundamental importance of the family unit to our community, the diversification of the family has posed an important challenge to all sectors.

There is also a growing acknowledgement of the potentially destructive nature of family-life as our society is confronted by the reality of violence, victimization and traditional patterns of dominance within the family unit.

Changing gender roles and an increased recognition of the rights of children for a safe and nurturing environment is resulting in a fundamental questioning of traditional roles within the family.

6) Multiculturalism

Although the projected increase in immigration is still below the rates of the 1950's, the countries-of-origin have changed dramatically. The immigrants of the fifties came primarily from Great Britain and Europe, were white and were predominantly Christians. The immigrants of the eighties and nineties contain, and will continue to contain, a much higher concentration of persons from different races and religious heritages. There are growing concerns about racial, religious and cultural intolerance as our community and country continues to evolve as one of the most multi-racial and multicultural entities in the world.

7) Environmental Issues

The growing awareness of the need for increased protection of our environment is challenging the government, business and consumer sectors. Conflicts between environmental protection and traditional notions of economic growth are moving to the forefront and this is requiring a painful review of our national and personal priorities.

In an attempt to grapple with this difficult issue, there is a growing interest in adopting the principle of "sustainable development" as a new paradigm for public policy decision-making. This paradigm represents the first comprehensive attempt to combine economic, environmental and social considerations into one planning/decision-making process.

8) Growth in Pluralism and Participatory Democracy

The growth in pluralism is frequently identified as a major shift in our national and local consciousness as our society increasingly reflects a collection of "special interest groups" rather than a unified whole. This is related to an increased emphasis on equality, rights and empowerment. As these groups attempt to express and act upon their rights, the traditional Canadian approach to representative democracy has been replaced by an increased demand for direct participation by citizens in all aspects of decision-making-political participation, consumer involvement/control in human services, and employee involvement in the workplace.

9) Social Disparities

A number of factors have served to increase the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots". Statistics indicate that the 1980's were a period when the "poor got poorer" and the "rich got richer" and the middle-group suffered a loss of real income. There are growing concerns that this trend will undermine social stability and is inconsistent with the traditional Canadian commitment to equity.

This trend is complicated by an increased tendency to question the effectiveness of government programs in resolving these problems.

10) The Inclusive Community

Traditionally, government programs in Ontario have isolated persons with special-needs from the community by placing them in institutions. This approach was also apparent in the kind of large scale, high concentrated public housing

projects which "ghettoized" low-income families in specific neighbourhoods during the 1960s and 1970s.

This philosophy has undergone a dramatic change during the past decade. Large institutions for psychiatrically disabled, physically disabled and developmentally disabled persons are being scaled down or closed. The new approach to public housing or affordable housing is one of dispersing units throughout the community. Significant efforts are being made to ensure that elderly persons remain in the community, rather than institutions.

This shift is occurring because of strong evidence that the "community" represents a far more humane, effective and efficient alternative to supporting persons in need.

The major challenge is to create an "inclusive" community which includes, rather than excludes, these residents. The creation of an inclusive community requires major changes in resource allocations, programs and public attitudes.

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